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RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Ahmadinejad in Baghdad

Key stories in the media:

This morning the electronic media reported that the IDF's "Operation Hot Winter" in Gaza has come to an end. The pull out of Infantry

and armored forces was completed in the early hours Monday morning, however, IAF strikes continue. Ha'aretz reported that the IDF senior command recommended keeping up the intensive pressure on Hamas, while The Jerusalem Post quoted senior GOI officials as saying that the government will wait to see if Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit this week brings calm before deciding on a wider offensive in Gaza. The officials were quoted as saying that the longer-term goals for an IDF operation that has not yet been approved by the government include "weakening and even bringing down the [Hamas] government." IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi was quoted as saying that contrary to media reports, 90 of the 100 Palestinians killed so far were gunmen. The electronic media reported that Ashkelon was again hit by two rockets this morning following the IDF withdrawal; no injuries were reported.

Ha'aretz and other media reported that PM Ehud Olmert is expected to stress to Secretary Rice at their scheduled meeting in Jerusalem Tuesday evening that Israel reserves the right to act freely in the Gaza Strip against Hamas and other Palestinian terror groups. According to Ha'aretz, Olmert will also tell Rice that Israel is interested in continuing negotiations with moderate elements in the PA. In Olmert's view, Israeli military activity in Gaza has sent a message to Hamas that the group needs to rethink its strategy. "Israel will not consent to the equation that Hamas wants to dictate in the Gaza Strip by firing on Ashkelon. We will be the ones to create the equation, not Hamas," he was quoted as saying at Sunday's weekly cabinet meeting.

Ha'aretz and other media reported that Defense Minister Ehud Barak is considering the use of artillery against populated areas of Gaza from which Qassam and Katyusha rockets are being fired. Barak will meet with other officials today to examine the legal aspects of such

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strikes. Various media quoted Vice PM Haim Ramon as saying at Sunday morning's government session: "Why don't we shoot at the sources of the fire? According to international law, we are allowed to do it. The issue was legally examined during the Second Lebanon War and the conclusion was that if they fire from a village, we are allowed to fire back even if this is a populated area." Ha'aretz reported that cabinet minister Ami Ayalon (Labor) is planning to propose that Israel begin indirect negotiations with Hamas, with Egyptian mediation, to bring about a cease-fire in Gaza.

On Sunday Maariv reported that FM Tzipi Livni told the Palestinians on Saturday that their decision to suspend negotiations over the violence in Gaza was in breach of the understandings agreed upon at Annapolis. Furthermore, the FM was quoted as saying that the Palestinians' decision to suspend the talks would have no impact on the IDF activity in the Gaza Strip.

The media reported that a 14-year-old Palestinian was shot dead by IDF troops in Hebron as violence spilled over into the West Bank. This morning, IDF Radio reported that an armed Israeli settler opened fire and killed a 17-year-old Palestinian hurling rocks at a public bus traveling near Ramallah. There were also protests against the army's operations in Gaza by Israeli Arabs in Wadi Ara and elsewhere.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that on Friday the Bush administration declined to interfere in the case of American terror victims who are suing the PLO.

Ha'aretz wrote that local defense officials reported on Sunday that Israel has recently purchased a new supply of Logol pills against nuclear radiation.

Maariv reported that Salah Abassi, an Israeli-Arab publisher from Haifa, has started to translate Israeli best-sellers and distribute them in Arab countries.

1. Mideast:

Summary:

Veteran journalist Hemmi Shalev wrote in the independent Israel Hayom: "The complicated situation we are now in -- between a rock

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and a hard place, as the Americans say -- is a direct result, to a large degree, of the failed policy of the Bush administration in the Middle East."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "Condoleezza Rice, accompanied by an armada of American generals that have been roaming around here for many months taking notes, will come to Jerusalem tomorrow. Let's see [Olmert] extricate himself from that."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The choice between [controlling the Gaza Strip and negotiating a long-term cease-fire with Hamas] is a choice between the plague and cholera. Nevertheless, it appears to be unavoidable."

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "When senior Israeli military and political leaders speak about obliterating neighborhoods in the Gaza Strip or shrug their shoulders at the killing of Palestinian civilians, they must understand the cost of these kinds of retaliatory operations on the peace process."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "Instead of looking for ways to 'pay' Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas to return to talks with Israel, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice must impose concrete costs on Hamas's aggression.... The alternative ... is ... even more surely burying the process that the U.S. is trying to revive."

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote on page one of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe: "Israel must not be tempted again to ... a cease-fire proposal, which will serve only Hamas."

Block Quotes:

II. "Like a Bird on a Trip Wire"

Veteran journalist Hemmi Shalev wrote in the independent Israel Hayom (3/3): "Tomorrow, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will arrive in the region. According to knowledgeable sources, Rice is said to be angry at everyone, including Israel, even though the complicated situation we are now in -- between a rock and a hard place, as the Americans say -- is a direct result, to a large degree, of the failed policy of the Bush administration in the

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Middle East, a policy that is now returning, perhaps as a last resort, to the gunboat diplomacy of the 19th century."

II. "Waiting for Condoleezza"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (3/3): "[Cabinet minister Ami Ayalon says]: 'We have to achieve a cease-fire from a position of strength, which will be binding on all the organizations. We have to reach an agreement on the crossing points with the cooperation of the international community, and we need a courageous and genuine political process in Judea and Samaria [i.e. the West Bank]. There are 600 roadblocks there and not one of them is being removed, and in such a way there will never be a better economic situation there.

About all these things we have to think, to talk, to hold a discussion.' Ah, there lies the problem. 'I don't identify willingness for such a discussion on the part of the Defense Minister, says Ayalon. What he does not say, at least publicly, is that Olmert is a hostage of the Defense Minister and cannot force such a discussion on him.... The Prime Minister tries to maneuver

between Barak and Ayalon, the general and the admiral, without getting entangled. He is, after all, just a corporal. For his part, it is better for Ayalon to blow up at Barak than at him. But Ayalon knows that in the end, the responsibility lies on the shoulders of one Ehud only -- Olmert. One of his aides called him a 'prime minister without portfolio.' At this rate, it appears that Olmert does not lack portfolios. Ayalon is not necessarily the weightiest of these. Condoleezza Rice, accompanied by an armada of American generals that have been roaming around here for many months taking notes, will come to Jerusalem tomorrow. Let's see him extricate himself from that."

III. "Between the Plague and Cholera"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (3/2): "Conquering the Gaza Strip is likely to cost a large number of casualties on both sides. More difficult than that, from Israel's perspective, is the problem of controlling the Gaza Strip after the conquest. The feeble coexistence between Israel and the PA that exists in the West Bank cannot be applied, as is, to the Gaza Strip. The other option, for Israel to resign itself to the existence of the Hamas regime in Gaza and to negotiate with it over a long-term cease-fire, comes with equally high costs. Among other things, it is a death sentence to Abu Mazen's regime, with which Israel hoped to reach an agreement; it will end the international boycott on Hamas; and it

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marks Israel's resigning itself to the existence of an Iranian base near the Israeli hinterland. The choice between those two options is a choice between the plague and cholera. Nevertheless, it appears to be unavoidable."

IV. "Bank of Political Objectives"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (3/3): "The usual 'criterion' for success -- the body count -- is on Israel's side, but it cannot be a goal in and of itself if it does not stop the Palestinian rocket fire. At the same time, the fighting in Gaza could damage the desire to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians over the long term.... The Palestinian Authority, which considers itself committed to the Arab League initiative and the understandings reached at the Annapolis summit -- the same PA that was forcibly robbed of its authority in the Gaza Strip by Hamas -- cannot escape its commitment to the peace process at precisely this trying time. But it would be delusional on Israel's part to think the PA can ignore the fighting in the Gaza Strip and calmly sit down at the negotiating table when not only gunmen but also innocent civilians, including newborns, are being killed in Gaza. And so, when senior Israeli military and political leaders speak about obliterating neighborhoods in the Gaza Strip or shrug their shoulders at the killing of Palestinian civilians, they must understand the cost of these kinds of retaliatory operations on the peace process."

IV. "Defeating Hamas"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (3/3): "Hamas has calculated that, since it does not care about and indeed cynically exploits the suffering of its own people, it has nothing to lose. The more it escalates, the more likely it will compel Israel to respond with greater force, the more Israel will be blamed for the inevitable collateral damage from its operations, and the more pressure there will be to negotiate with Hamas and reduce its isolation. In other words, the more Hamas attacks Israel, the better its chances for international acceptance. Accordingly, if the international community, particularly the U.S., truly wants to prevent further escalation, it must break this cycle. Instead of looking for ways to 'pay' Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas to return to talks with Israel, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice must impose concrete costs on Hamas's aggression. This means greatly increasing the pressure on Egypt to stop the weapons flow into Gaza, and supporting Israel's right to respond with the necessary means,

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as any other state would, in order to defeat those responsible for the unprovoked terrorist attacks against her cities. To the U.S., such a course of action may seem unwarranted in that it risks censure by Europe and trouble in the UN. The alternative, however, is encouraging a deepening war that will cost many lives, handing victories to militant Islamists, and even more surely burying the process that the U.S. is trying to revive."

VI. "Anything But a Cease-Fire"

Senior columnist Haggai Huberman wrote on page one of the nationalist, Orthodox Makor Rishon-Hatzofe (3/2): "A cease-fire is in the interests of Hamas. Under its cover, it will be able to grow as strong as Hizbullah. This contradicts the Israeli goal of preventing Hamas from growing stronger, which will lead to long-term calm. Security-establishment officials know that a cease-fire can be accepted only if there is full supervision of the Israeli-Egyptian border. Since such supervision does not look realistic right now, a cease-fire is not in Israel's interest. Throughout its history, Israel has known cease-fires many times that only gave enemies the time they needed to resume fighting under conditions that were more comfortable for them and more difficult for us. Israel must not be tempted again to such a cease-fire proposal, which will serve only Hamas."

12. Ahmadinejad in Baghdad:

Summary:

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Ahmadinejad's arrival [in Baghdad] raises questions about Washington's ability to set up permanent military bases in Iraq in the future."

Block Quotes:

"Baghdad's New Strategic Partner"

Senior Middle East affairs analyst Zvi Bar'el wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (3/3): "The historic visit to

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Iraq by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which began on Sunday, suggests that Tehran is finding ways to bypass efforts to pressure it.... And while the United States is holding talks with Iraq on the details of a bilateral cooperation agreement that will define America's status in Iraq following a U.S. withdrawal, Ahmadinejad's arrival raises questions about Washington's ability to set up permanent military bases in Iraq in the future. The official visit by Iran's president also holds out a promise of cooperation and economic ties with the Kurdish autonomous region. If Turkey continues to pressure the PKK guerrillas and imposes sanctions on Kurdistan, Iran will become the Kurds' main economic outlet. With its links to the Kurds, its economic contribution to Iraq and its close political ties with the main Shi'ite parties, Iran is increasingly becoming a strategic partner of Iraq. Hence Washington's recognition of the need for political dialogue with Tehran about Iraq's future. But this development worries the Arab League, and especially Saudi Arabia, which is being faced with another large Shi'ite state on its borders."

JONES